

Message Text

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AMCONSUL SYDNEY

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AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY KUALALUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MANILA

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AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY

CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMEMBASSY LONDON

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 CANBERRA 933

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, AS, PFOR

SUBJ: THE FRASER GOVERNMENT IN POWER

1. SUMMARY: ALTHOUGH IN POWER LESS THAN TWO MONTHS, PRIME MINISTER FRASER'S STYLE AND PERSONALITY HAVE ALREADY HAD A GREAT IMPACT ON THE AUSTRALIAN POLITICAL SCENE. MINISTERS AND CIVIL SERVANTS HAVE BEEN WORKING HARDER THAN EVER, ESPECIALLY DURING THE AUSTRALIAN SUMMER; THERE HAVE BEEN A NUMBER OF INSTITUTIONAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGES PROPOSED WITH
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SOME ALREADY EFFECTED; THERE IS A CLEAR SENSE OF DIRECTION

IN AUSTRALIAN POLITICS, DIRIGISTE AND TO THE RIGHT. END SUMMARY.

2. FOR THE OUTSIDE OBSERVER IT IS ESPECIALLY INTERESTING TO NOTE THE CHANGE IN PRIME MINISTER FRASER SINCE HIS LANDSLIDE VICTORY ON DECEMBER 13. HE IS RELAXED AND CONFIDENT. HE HAS ALREADY PROVEN HIMSELF TO BE A FORCEFUL AND POWERFUL LEADER, UNAFRAID OF MAJOR INNOVATIONS. IN THE MEETINGS WE HAVE HAD WITH HIM HE HAS SHOWN A RELAXED AND RELATIVELY HUMOROUS SIDE TO HIS PERSONALITY, A SIDE WHICH WE HAD NOT SUSPECTED BEFORE HIS OVERWHELMING ELECTION TRIUMPH. HE HAS THE CONFIDENCE TO WORK FOR MAJOR CHANGE, LARGELY SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC, WHICH HE HAS LONG THOUGHT NECESSARY FOR AUSTRALIA. AT THE SAME TIME, HE HAS DISPLAYED A CERTAIN FLEXIBILITY AND PRAGMATISM IN HIS ACTIONS.

3. IN THE DARK DAYS OF OCTOBER AND EARLY NOVEMBER 1975 BEFORE THE GOVERNOR GENERAL'S DECISION TO DISSOLVE PARLIAMENT ON NOVEMBER 11, FRASER WAS BROUGHT TO DESPERATE POLITICAL POSITION BY FORMER PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM'S FAILURE TO GIVE IN AND RESIGN FOLLOWING THE LIBERAL COUNTRY PARTY'S DECISION TO BRING DOWN HIS GOVERNMENT BY BLOCKING GOVERNMENT APPROPRIATIONS BILLS IN THE SENATE. DURING THIS PERIOD, LEADERS OF THE COUNTRY PARTY (WHO HAD MOST TO LOSE POLITICALLY THROUGH ELECTORAL REDISTRIBUTION IF THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY STAYED IN POWER AND DEVELOPED A WORKING MAJORITY IN THE SENATE) AND A FEW HARD LINE MEMBERS OF HIS OWN LIBERAL PARTY SUCH AS NOW DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER LYNCH AND SENATOR WITHERS, PROVIDED FRASER WITH HIS STRONGEST SUPPORT. NOT SURPRISINGLY, FRASER HAS GIVEN THE STRONGEST POWER POSITIONS IN HIS NEW GOVERNMENT TO THESE MEN. THEY, ALONG WITH FRASER, ARE IN EFFECTIVE CONTROL WITH OTHER MINISTERS ON THE OUTSIDE LOOKING IN. THESE OTHER MINISTERS INCLUDE FOREIGN MINISTER PEACOCK, DEFENSE MINISTER KILLEN, AND THE PREVIOUS CARETAKER MINISTER FOR SOCIAL SECURITY DON CHIPP.

4. IN THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL FIELDS, FRASER TOLD US PRIVATELY BEFORE HIS ELECTION THAT HE INTENDED TO GIVE CONFIDENTIAL

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HIS HIGHEST PRIORITY TO REDEVELOPING INDIVIDUAL ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL FREEDOM IN AUSTRALIA - ESPECIALLY THE FREEDOM OF THE INDIVIDUAL TO DISPOSE OF HIS INCOME AS HE SAW FIT. HE SAID THAT AUSTRALIA HAD ONLY FIVE YEARS TO PREVENT THE INFUSION OF THE QTE BRITISH DISEASE END QTE AND THA HE WOULD RATHER QTE GO DOWN IN FLAMES END QTE THAN HEAD A GOVERNMENT WHICH WOULD MOVE IN THAT DIRECTION. IT SHOULD BE BORNE IN MIND THAT FRASER SEES

HIMSELF AS A CLASSIC CONSERVATIVE. AMONG OTHER INTERESTS HE HAS AN 8,000 ACRE ESTATE IN VICTORIA. HE IS A MILLIONAIRE. IT IS GENERALLY BELIEVED THAT HE IS MUCH FURTHER TO THE RIGHT THAN A LARGE PERCENTAGE OF HIS FOLLOWER LIBERAL PARTY MEMBERS. HE PROBABLY HAS MORE IN COMMON WITH THE COUNTRY PARTY THAN HE DOES WITH THE MAJORITY OF THE LIBERAL PARTY, HENCE ONE LIBERAL MINISTER'S PRIVATE REFERENCE TO HIM AS QTE FRASER THE GRAZIER. END QTE

5. FRASER IS A PRIME MINISTER WHO IS DETERMINED TO MAINTAIN STRONG, ALMOST MENZIAN CONTROL OVER HIS GOVERNMENT. AS ONE MEANS TO ACCOMPLISH THIS, HE HAS ESTABLISHED SIX CABINET STANDING COMMITTEES. FRASER HIMSELF WILL CHAIR FOUR OF THESE COMMITTEES: PLANNING AND COORDINATION; ECONOMICS; FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENSE; AND MACHINERY OF GOVERNMENT.

THE TREASURER, MR. LYNCH, WILL CHAIR THE GENERAL ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE, WHILE THE DEPUTY LEADER OF THE NATIONAL COUNTRY PARTY, MR. IAN SINCLAIR, WILL CHAIR THE LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE. MR. FRASER IS THE ONLY MINISTER WHO WILL PARTICIPATE IN THE WORK OF ALL SIX COMMITTEES. THIS CABINET SYSTEM NARROWS THE DECISION-MAKING FUNCTION IN THE NEW GOVERNMENT. REAL POWER NOW LIES NOT WITHIN THE OVERALL CABINET OR EVEN WITHIN THE TWELVE-MAN INNER COUNCIL, BUT INSIDE AN EVEN SMALLER GROUP LED EITHER BY FRASER HIMSELF OR BY HIS CLOSEST POLITICAL SUPPORTERS. THUS, FRASER'S ONLY APPARENT RIVAL FOR PARTY LEADERSHIP, ANDREW PEACOCK, IS EXCLUDED FROM THE COMMITTEES CONCERNED WITH ECONOMICS. HE IS A MEMBER OF ONLY ONE COMMITTEE - FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENSE, WHICH FRASER CHAIRS. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE DEPUTY COUNTRY PARTY LEADER, IAN SINCLAIR, ONE OF FRASER'S CLOSEST SUPPORTERS AND A CONFIDANT, SITS ON FOUR OF THE COMMITTEES

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

6. FRASER MOVED QUICKLY TO ORGANIZE THE WAY HIS GOVERNMENT WOULD FUNCTION. AS INDICATED ABOVE, THE STRUCTURE IS DESIGNED SO THAT HE AND ONLY HE IS CLEARLY IN CHARGE. HE HAS AS WELL DONE A NUMBER OF MINOR QTE STYLISTIC UNQTE THINGS REMINISCENT OF SIR ROBERT MENZIES, WHOM HE RESPECTS. SEEMINGLY SOMEWHAT ALOOF AND DISTANT PRIOR TO HIS ELECTION, HE OBVIOUSLY HAS VERY DELIBERATELY SOUGHT TO CULTIVATE PEOPLE, EVEN IN THE SMALL DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY IN CANBERRA, IN A WARM AND RELAXED MANNER. THE STYLE OF HIS GOVERNMENT QUITE OBVIOUSLY WILL BE VERY DIFFERENT FROM
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HIS PREDECESSOR'S. HE CLEARLY PUTS GREAT CONFIDENCE IN THE CLASSIC DEPARTMENTS OF GOVERNMENT AND THE AUSTRALIAN CIVIL SERVICE. MOST OF THE SENIOR CIVIL SERVANTS, WHO ANTICIPATED A RELAXED SUMMER HOLIDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS, HAVE BEEN BURNING THE IDNIGHT OIL. ONE DEPARTMENT SECRETARY TOLD ME, QTE IT'S BEEN AS HECTIC AROUND HERE AS IT EVER WAS IN THE WHITLAM DAYS. THEN WE WERE TRYING TO PUT OUT FIRES, NOW WE ARE REALLY ACCOMPLISHING

SOMETHING, END QTE.

7. IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER THE PRIME MINISTER WILL BE ABLE TO DEVELOP THE CONTROL OVER GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS THAT HE DESIRES. WE SEE AN INCREASING ROLE FOR THE PUBLIC SERVICE AND A LESSENERED ROLE FOR MEMBERS OF THE CABINET THAN WAS THE CASE UNDER FORMER PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM. HOWEVER, FRASER DOES NOT CONTROL ALL BRANCHES OF THE LIBERAL PARTY, NOT EVEN HIS OWN VICTORIAN BRANCH WHERE ANDREW PEACOCK MAINTAINS A STRONG POWER POSITION AND IS CAPABLE OF ACTING ON HIS OWN. (PEACOCK HAS ALREADY HAD SEVERAL SERIOUS RUN-INS WITH FRASER OVER TIMOR AND OVER THE INDIAN OCEAN AND HAS SURVIVED. DURING THE VISIT OF CODEL HOLLINGS, PEACOCK WAS GREATLY ANGERED BECAUSE FRASER DID NOT INVITE HIM TO TAKE PART IN A PRIVATE MEETING HE HELD WITH THE U.S. SENATORS. AFTER THE MEETING THERE WAS SUBSTANTIAL PRESS COMMENT ON A QTE NEW AUSTRALIAN POSITION END QTE ON THE INDIAN OCEAN. LATER IN THE DAY, PEACOCK ISSUED A STATEMENT OF HIS OWN QTE CLARIFYING END QTE AUSTRALIA'S POSITION. THIS IN TURN ANGERED FRASER WHO HAD TOLD ALL HIS MINISTERS THAT PRESS STATEMENTS SHOULD BE CLEARED WITH HIM AND THEN ISSUED AS OFFICIAL GOA, NOT PRIVATE, RELEASES. AGAIN, WHILE HIS CLOSEST ALLIES ARE MEMBERS OF THE NCP, THERE ARE AREAS - LARGELY ECONOMIC - WHERE THEIR INTERESTS DO NOT COINCIDE WITH LIBERAL PARTY INTERESTS. MOREOVER, THERE IS A REAL POTENTIAL PROBLEM ON ELECTORAL REDISTRIBUTION. LIBERAL SENATOR WITHERS, THE MINISTER CHARGED WITH REDISTRIBUTION, IS AN IMPLACABLE ENEMY OF THE COUNTRY PARTY AND WILL UNDOUBTEDLY SEEK ELECTORAL CHANGES FAVORING THE LIBERALS AT THE EXPENSE OF THE NCP.

8. FRASER HAS SO FAR FOLLOWED A CONSERVATIVE BUT NOT CONFIDENTIAL

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EXTREME COURSE IN ECONOMIC AND MONETARY POLICY. HIS MOST CONTROVERSIAL MOVE HAS BEEN TO OPPOSE A WAGE INDEXATION RAISE OF OVER 3.2 PERCENT AFTER INDICATING DURING HIS ELECTION CAMPAIGN THAT HE WOULD GO ALONG WITH FULL INDEXATION (SEE CANBERRA 826). FRASER HAS ALSO ANNOUNCED BUDGET CUTS WHICH WILL SLASH EXPENDITURES BY APPROXIMATELY A\$360 MILLION BEFORE THE END OF JUNE 1976. MOST OF THESE CUTS WERE ADMINISTRATIVE, AND LARGELY OPTICAL, BUT OTHERS WOULD HIT THE PUBLIC IMMEDIATELY. FOR EXAMPLE, DRUG PRESCRIPTION CHARGES WILL RISE; HOSPITAL BUILDING WILL BE CUT BACK; INCREASES IN OLD AGE PENSIONS WILL BE DELAYED BY A MONTH. DFA WILL HAVE TO CLOSE SOME OVERSEAS POSTS AND A\$21 MILLION WILL BE LOPPED OFF FOREIGN AID. THE DEFENSE BUDGET WAS THE ONLY ONE NOT SUBJECT TO SOME REDUCTIONS. FRASER HAS HINTED THAT HE WILL MAKE EVEN GREATER CUTS SOON.

9. IN THE MONETARY FIELD, THE NEW GOVERNMENT HAS TAKEN SOME STEPS THAT WOULD INDICATE A MORE RESTRICTIVE POLICY DESIGNED TO CURB AUSTRALIA'S SERIOUS INFLATION. (SEE CANBERRA 718).

10. RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES - THE FRASER GOVERNMENT'S RELATIONS WITH THE U.S. ON FOREIGN POLICY AND DEFENSE MATTERS WILL BE CLOSE AND CORDIAL. FRASER HIMSELF STORNGLY SUPPORTS THE AUSTRLIAN-AMERICAN ALLIANCE AND WILL BE MORE OPENLY SUPPORTIVE OF THE U.S. ON SPECIFIC ISSUES THAN MANY MEMBERS OF HIS OWN PARTY WOULD LIKE HIM TO BE.

11. BUT WE MUST NOT FORGET THAT AUSTRALIAN OPINION HAS CHANGED MARKEDLY FROM THE QTE ALL THE WAY WITH LBJ END QTE DAYS OF THE VIETNAM WAR. WATERGATE, URBAN UNREST IN AMERICA, AND A PERCEIVED SHIFT IN U.S. PUBLIC OPINION TOWARDS LESS INVOLVEMENT ABROAD HAVE DIMINISHED BOTH THE LUSTER AND THE VALUE OF TOO CLOSE A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNITED STATES IN THE EYES OF MANY THOUGHFUL AUSTRALIANS. FRASER, ON THE OTHER HAND, WANTS TO GETBACK TO BUSINESS AS USUAL WITH US BOTH BECAUSE HE IS EMOTIONALLY COMMITTED TO THE US-AUSTRALIAN ALLIANCE AND BECAUSE HE BELIEVES AND REFLECTS THE VIEW OF CONSERVATIVE AUSTRALIANS THAT U.S. FACILITIES IN AUSTRALIA AND AUSTRALIAN SUPPORT

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FOR OTHER U.S. FOREIGN POLICY INITIATIVES TENDS TO TIE THE U.S. MORE CLOSELY TO AUSTRALIA.

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12. UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES THERE MIGHT WELL BE A
TEMPTATION TO SEEK ADDITIONAL FACILITIES IN AUSTRALIA
AND TO PUSH FOR THE RESOLUTION OF OTHER DEFENSE RELATED
ISSUES AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE. IN OUR VIEW, THE USG
SHOULD MOVE CAUTIOUSLY IN THESE AREAS. AFTER SOME ROUGH
PATCHES WE ACHIEVED A REASONABLE WORKING RELATIONSHIP
WITH THE ALP. THE ALP IN OPPOSITION, LACKING MANY OF
ITS MORE MODERATE MEMBERS DEFEATED IN THE RECENT ELECTIONS,
IS APT TO SEIZE ON ANY INSTALLATION OF ADDITIONAL U.S.
FACILITIES IN AUSTRALIA OR THE RESOLUTION OF OTHER
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OUTSTANDING DEFENSE RELATED MATTERS TO ATTACK THE
FRASER GOVERNMENT FOR TOADYING TO THE U.S. THERE ARE
ALSO ELEMENTS WITHIN THE ALP'S LEFT WING, WHICH IS
NOW A MAJORITY WITHIN THE ALP'S PARLIAMENTARY CAUCUS,
WHO WISH TO REMOVE ALL U.S. FACILITIES FROM AUSTRALIA.
TOO CLOSE A U.S. IDENTIFICATION WITH THE FRASER GOVERN-
MENT ON DEFENSE MATTERS COULD STRENGTHEN THIS ELEMENT
WITHIN THE ALP AND CAUSE DIFFICULTIES FOR US IN THE
FUTURE. OUR LONG TERM INTERESTS IN DEFENSE AND FOR-
EIGN AFFAIRS MATTERS WILL BEST BE SERVED BY PAYING
CLOSE ATTENTION TO THE VIEWS OF ALL POLITICAL ELEMENTS
IN AUSTRALIA. THE ALP IS STILL THE STRONGEST POLITICAL
PARTY HERE. IT WILL EVENTUALLY RETURN TO POWER. IF
WE PUSH TOO HARD NOW WE COULD CREATE A FUTRUE POLITICAL

ENVIRONMENT HERE WHICH COULD JEOPARDIZE THE LONG-TERM RETENTION OF OUR REALLY IMPORTANT FACILITIES.

13. IT IS IN THE ECONOMIC AREA, PARTICULARLY IN TRADE RELATIONS, WHERE WE MIGHT EXPECT TO HAVE FAIRLY IMMEDIATE PROBLEMS WITH THE NEW GOVERNMENT. ALTHOUGH THE GOA'S POLICY ON TRADE IS NOT YET CLEAR, THE LIBERAL AND COUNTRY PARTIES HAVE GENERALLY FOLLOWED A MORE RESTRICTIVE IMPORT POLICY. IT APPEARS THAT THE NEW GOVERNMENT WILL BE EVEN MORE PROTECTIONIST THAN WAS THE WHITLAM GOVERNMENT. WHILE ENCOURAGING FOREIGN INVESTMENT IN CERTAIN LONG-TERM DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS, IT IS ALSO FAIRLY LIKELY THAT THE NEW GOVERNMENT WILL CONTINUE TO RESTRICT FOREIGN INVESTMENT IN OTHER AREAS. ON BALANCE, HOWEVER, WE WOULD EXPECT FEWER INVESTMENT-RELATED PROBLEMS THAN UNDER THE WHITLAM GOVERNMENT.
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